

INTERVIEW SERIES *Kolkata: Run in the Alley*
Curators Manuel Klappe and Praneet Soi.
by Lipika Bansal

Origins

The name of the exhibit was inspired by the beautiful pen and ink drawing by Ganesh Pyne (1968) – *Kolkata: Run in the Alley* – that depicts a boy running with his kite, in an alleyway of Pyne’s neighborhood of North Kolkata. When we saw it, Manuel said “that’s a great name for the show”, and it stuck. To give a more current feel to the show, we asked the artist Sumantra Mukherjee to design the exhibition poster.



Ganesh Pyne, *Run in the Alley*, 1968

Exhibition Design

On the ground floor, structural frameworks made of bamboo support the artworks and unify the space physically. They are reminiscent of the bamboo scaffoldings that can be seen all around Kolkata, which are used a lot for constructions and renovations. Juxtaposed onto Marres’ classical architecture, the bamboo structures completely change the feel of the space. We can imagine someone using them to paint the ceiling or fix the doors.



Bamboo frameworks, featuring work by Tim Breukers and Bonno van Doorn

So, whereas downstairs you have the colorful, layered, chaotic streets of Kolkata, upstairs you have a private, intimate feel – to showcase the more detailed and sensual pieces of the exhibit. Koen Taselaar designed the installation. He referred to the do-it-yourself manual of the Italian modernist Enzo Mari to build the tables, and the screens were also built by hand. Like a Bauhaus way to make a show, the scenography of the two floors allow for different positions to come together. We wanted to highlight this multiplicity to reflect the organic process that brought the Bengali and Netherlands-based artists together during the CARF residency. The curatorial position tends to flatten out the art show, but we didn’t mind texture, noise; different mediums coming together, even to make something conceptual, figurative.



Installation designed by Koen Taselaar, featuring work by Paula Sengupta and Gautam Choudhury

Bengal Modernists

We included three generations of Bengal modernists – a few “classics” – to situate the exhibition’s contemporary pieces within a larger context. West Bengal’s current artistic processes are still deeply influenced by the cultural legacy of the Bengal Renaissance. Somnath Hore, who is no longer alive, was a communist and in the 1920s, he went to the tea Gardens to document the workers striking. For long he was ignored, but now he’s risen into prominence. We managed to get a variety of his work here: etching, woodcut, lino and sculpture. From the second generation, we have Benode Behari Mukherjee. When he started going blind, he began working with collages, which is what we have in the exhibition. He was the teacher of many known artists, including Riten Mozumdar.



Somnath Hore, *Untitled*.

Ushmita Sahu is a scholar whose research centers around Mozumdar’s work. He was an artist-designer from Santiniketa and collaborated a lot with European design firms. Sahu is interested in that precise moment in time, in the intersection of cultures, artisanship and expertise.



Riten Mozumdar, *Untitled*, early 1980's

The Artists

The core of the exhibition is the work of Bengali and Netherlands-based artists, who met, collaborated and learned from each other during the CARF residency that Soi started in 2014.

Sachi Miyachi is a Japanese artist who, like me (Soi), has been living in the Netherlands for many years. While in Kolkata, she made a series of drawings of her observations, big and small. Some of them depict the architecture she came across in the city, while others are facsimiles of kanthas she saw at the Gurusaday museum. She uses coloured pencils and 'mithai' boxes for her work.



Sachi Miyachi

Miyachi looked up during her wanderings and Henri Jacobs looked down: he was blown away by the footpath designs in Kolkata. He created terracotta tiles that form a colorful and geometric pavement inside Marres, imitating the colliding patterns of the city. You can actually walk on them to head from one part of the exhibition to the next.



Henri Jacobs

Nobina Gupta's subject is the wetlands outside Kolkata. Her work was created in collaboration with the folk artist Mamoni Chitraki. The result is that of two overlapping voices on the same theme; Gupta's painting and the same story filtered through the eyes of the craftswoman.



Nobina Gupta

Nilanjan Bhattachariya is a filmmaker from Kolkata. In his documentary, he follows a German artist who was commissioned by the Goethe Institute to create an architectural work in Kolkata. He chose to work with bamboo and did an over-the-top construction; commanding an army of people to make it happen. Bhattachariya, as a Bengali, looks at this from a critical lens – he emphasizes the inequality of power and resources that underlie such massive projects.

Arthur Stokvis' work depicts a hole-in-the-wall industry of plastic syringes in Kolkata. The aesthetic is inspired by KC Paul – a character famous for his graffiti and eccentric theories, a guy who had his own mythology. For the backdrop, Stokvis took images from the city and an iconography of bones, which resonates with the bamboo structures that support his paintings. On the floor, he placed red cement, which you see a lot in Indian homes when they paint during the spreading of chuna.



Nilanjan Bhattachariya

Looking at Stokvis' art, you witness multiple perspective coming together. On the left you have Ruchama Noorda's work, from the Netherlands, and behind you have Srikanta Paul's woodcuts, from Kolkata. Through the door, you see Maartje Korstanje's papier mâché Banyan tree, on which you can sit to read Sarbajit Sen's comics.



Arthur Stokvis

About the author

Lipika Bansal, founder of Textiel Factorij, is an artistic researcher and social designer. With her work, she investigates art and craft cultures of India and the Netherlands, their heritage, origin and local significance. Her practice involves experts from all disciplines, including artists, designers, craftspeople, makers, starters, amateurs, biologists and scientists. Their expertise represents a way of looking at the world that enriches the work based on local knowledge, local materials and reciprocity.